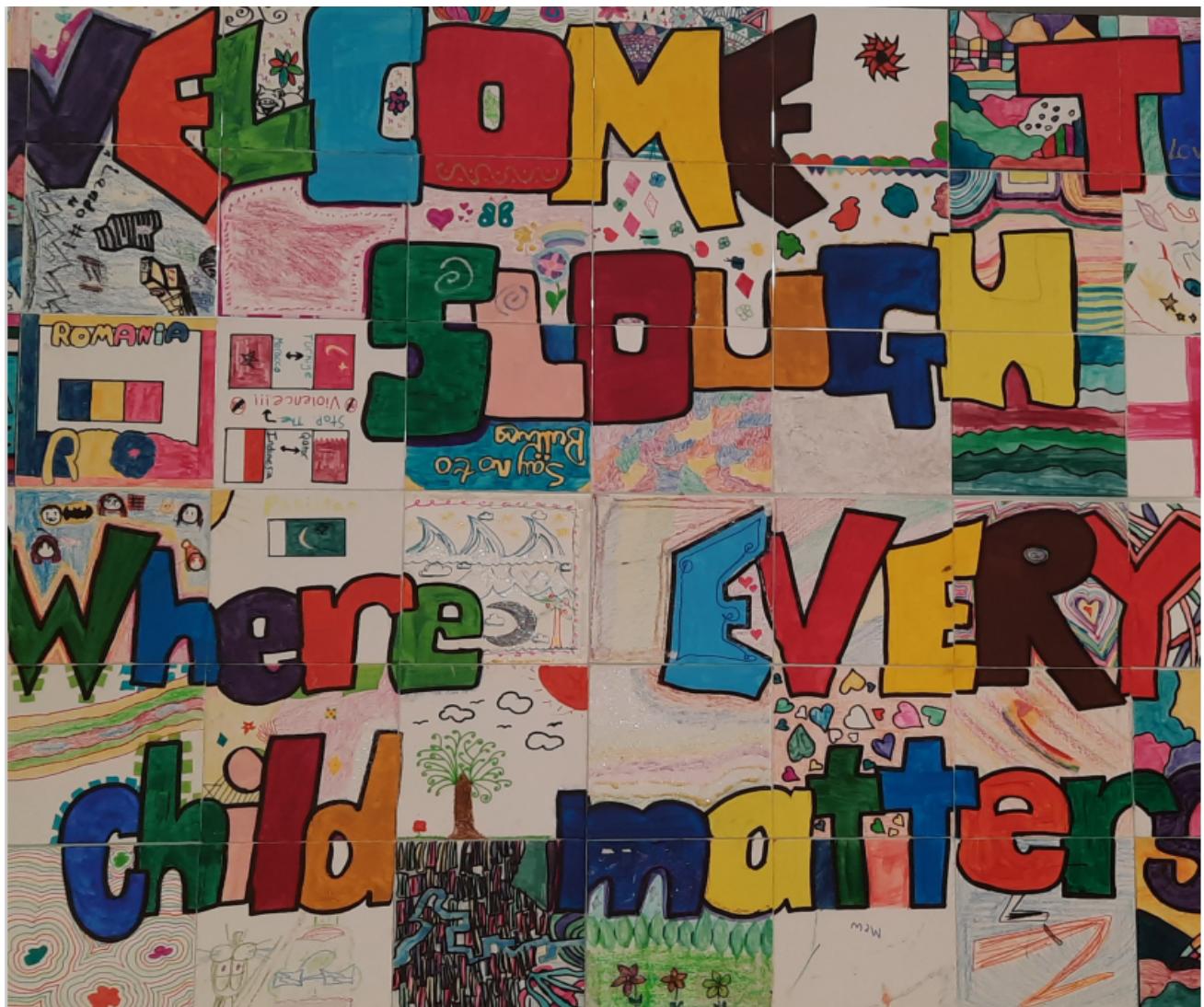




Working Together for Children: Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving

Slough Children First Business Plan 2026 – 2029





Policy Owner: **SLT**

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Summary:

This Business Plan outlines how Slough Children First (SCF) will build on current achievements and address future challenges with a strong focus on prevention, partnership, and relational social work over the next 3 years.





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1. Foreword

Simon Baker, Chair of SCF Board & Sue Butcher, Chief Executive:

“Children and young people in Slough deserve the best life chances. As we reflect on progress made and look ahead to 2029, this plan sets our ambitions clearly: delivering consistent, high-quality services through compassionate, community-led practice, even amidst challenge.”

We are proud to present this refreshed Business Improvement Plan for 2026–2029. It builds on the foundations laid over the last three years, during which Slough Children First has seen sustained improvements in leadership, practice, and outcomes. Our staff, partners, and community continue to demonstrate deep commitment to our shared vision, that every child in Slough is **Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving**.

Our journey has not been without significant challenge. As a company operating under statutory intervention, and in a borough still navigating the legacy of a Section 114 Notice, we have had to demonstrate resilience, innovation, and financial discipline. However, our children do not have time to wait, and neither will we. Our work continues to evolve to focus on early help, stability in care, meaningful participation with children and young people, and the development of a confident and permanent workforce.

Over the past year, the launch of the Slough Academy, the success of our Local Offer redesign, and the progress of our Family Help transformation reflect the maturity of our approach. Our partnerships with health, education, police, and the voluntary sector continue to deepen, and we are now co-designing solutions with young people, not just for them.

Our practice is informed by our **STAR** model, **Strengths-Based, Trauma-Informed, Attachment-Aware, and Restorative**. These principles are not just language; they are the way we lead, manage, learn and support our families. They shape our expectations and ground our promise to children and families.

This plan sets out our strategic priorities and how we will measure our success. But more importantly, it sets out our unwavering belief that children should grow up in safe, supportive, and ambitious communities, where they are seen, heard, and helped. Our goals align with national reform agendas like *Stable Homes Built on Love* and are rooted in the realities of our diverse, global majority, vibrant borough.

Together, we will continue to strive, improve, and most of all, deliver.

Simon Baker

Chair, SCF Board

Sue Butcher

Chief Executive SCF & Executive Director of Children's Services SBC



2. Executive Summary

Slough Children First (SCF) enters the 2026–2029 business planning cycle at a pivotal moment: one of transition, consolidation, and renewed ambition. As the company progresses from a period of government intervention into one of stabilisation and innovation, this Business Plan sets out our vision, priorities, and enablers for the next stage of our improvement journey.

We are driven by a clear and simple ambition that children are:

“Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving.”

This plan reaffirms our commitment to children and families, strengthens our alignment with national reform agendas such as 'Stable Homes, Built on Love', and sets out a roadmap to improve outcomes in an increasingly complex local and national landscape.

Our Local Context

Slough is one of the youngest and most diverse boroughs in the UK, with over 78% of children from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds (which we refer to as Global Majority in line with current thinking). 28% of our population is under 18, higher than the England average. We are located on the west side of London, and the Elizabeth Line has increased our connectivity to the city. Our statistical neighbours are largely London Boroughs reflecting some of our town's unique strengths, needs and challenges.

While this diversity is a strength, our children face multiple intersecting challenges:

- The legacy of Slough Borough Council's Section 114 notice and financial recovery efforts, including oversight by MCHLG commissioners
- Ongoing impacts of the cost-of-living crisis
- High levels of serious youth violence and exploitation
- Persistent health inequalities, including some of the highest childhood obesity rates in the country

This context demands a service that is both resilient and responsive, working in partnership with families, schools, the NHS, the police, and the voluntary and community sector to intervene earlier, work smarter, and build lasting change.

Who We Are and Where We Are Going

SCF is a wholly owned company of Slough Borough Council, delivering integrated children's services including social care, youth justice and early help. We are an improving organisation with:

- A stabilised and increasingly permanent workforce, supported by our Slough Academy
- A clearer governance and leadership framework
- A strong focus on practice quality, learning, and child-centred service design



- A more joined up working approach for our young people, particularly those with SEND, with education colleagues from SBC.

While structural discussions are underway about the reintegration of SCF into Slough Borough Council by 2028, our focus remains fixed: to maintain momentum and ensure continuity and ambition in service delivery.

Our Strategic Framework and Priorities

This Business Plan is underpinned by four child centred outcome goals, co-designed with children and families who want to be **Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving**

- To feel and be **Happy**
- To be able to live **Safely** without fear of harm at home or in the community.
- To feel **Loved** and cared for
- To have the ability to be the best version of myself and **Thrive**

To deliver these outcomes, we have identified six strategic priorities aligned with national policy and local need:

1. **Early Help and Access** – Strengthening community-based support and reducing escalation.
2. **Education and Preparation for Adulthood** – Improving pathways for NEET young people and care leavers.
3. **Stable Homes** – Increasing in-house provision and reducing reliance on costly placements.
4. **Workforce Excellence** – Expanding recruitment, training, and retention through clear progression and wellbeing support.
5. **Children's Participation** – Embedding youth voice in decision-making and system design.
6. **Partnership Driven Services** – Aligning planning, commissioning, and delivery across sectors.

These priorities are resourced through a robust financial plan, enabled by improved commissioning, and guided by a shared ambition to place relationships at the heart of all we do.

Quality, Risk and Accountability

We will ensure robust delivery through:

- Strengthening our application of the Quality Assurance framework
- Clear Improvement Plan deliverables and accountability framework
- Developing further our understanding and use of data through performance dashboards aligned to Ofsted's Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework
- Oversight from the Department of Education (DfE), Slough Borough Council (SBC), and the SCF Company Board
- Transparent annual reporting and meaningful engagement with young people



Every action is tested against the “So What?” principle, asking what difference it makes to the life of a child.

Equity at the Centre

We recognise that Slough is a diverse borough across all characteristics. Equity must be a guiding principle, not an afterthought. We acknowledge the importance of representation.

Our Pledge to Children and Young People

- Be Healthy
- Be Ambitious
- Be Resilient
- Be Happy
- Be Independent
- Be Safe

This Business Plan is not only a roadmap to 2029. It is a statement of purpose: to be bold, collaborative, and relentless in our focus on better outcomes for the children and families of Slough.

3. Our Improvement Journey

Slough Children First (SCF) has travelled a long path from foundational improvement to purposeful reform. Having been under statutory intervention for more than a decade, the organisation now stands at a pivotal point, one marked by maturing leadership, sustained performance progress, and a shifting national and local landscape.

2023–2029: A Journey of Reform

Our improvement has followed a structured three-phase model, and we are now firmly in the middle phase, performing and is progressing through it with clarity and resolve.

Phase	Timeline	Key Focus Areas
Reform	2023 – March 2025	Strengthen leadership, stabilise workforce, improve foundational practice.
Perform	April 2025 – Sept 2026	Embed STAR culture, sharpen QA, increase participation, and deliver the social care reforms.
Transform	Oct 2026 – March 2029	Consolidate improvements, innovate, and merge with SBC without disrupting the improvement agenda.

Youth Justice Services: The Slough Youth Justice Service sits within SCF and works collaboratively with the police, courts, education providers and families to reduce re-offending, support rehabilitation, and protect victims. Following our poor inspection outcome in January 2025, our Youth Justice Improvement Plan is focused on trauma informed, community-based interventions. The improvement plan has been the subject of significant scrutiny including the SCF Company Board, SBC's Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee. The Youth Justice Annual Plan, a prerequisite for all Youth Justice Services, has been agreed at full Council for the first time as well as being sent to the national Youth Justice Board in good time.



We are proud of the progress we have made, but we are not complacent. As we look toward the future, including reintegration with SBC, our identity remains grounded in our mission: to ensure every child in Slough is **Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving**.

From Statutory Oversight to Advisory Support

A significant milestone in 2025 was the DfE's decision to step down its appointed Commissioner role to that of an Improvement Adviser for children's social care. This marks a critical shift in confidence in SCF's leadership, governance, and ability to deliver sustained progress without formal statutory direction.

The Improvement Adviser now provides advisory oversight and challenge to both SCF and Slough Borough Council (SBC) through the Children's Improvement Board, ensuring continued momentum while recognising SCF's growing maturity and effectiveness.

Key Achievements Since Jan 2023

- **Governance Stability:** Consistent Board and Executive leadership; added nationally experienced Non-Executive Director in 2024.
- **Slough Academy Launched:** in 2024 with a focus on practice learning. A key emphasis on continuous workforce development and attracting and retaining high quality staff.
- **Reduced Statutory Intervention Rates:** Increasing partnership response to Family Need at an Early Help stage, leading to an overall decrease in demand.
- **Improved Performance Insight:** Data dashboards and service meetings now drive local area accountability although there is still much to do in this regard.
- **Youth Participation Strengthened:** Relaunched the Children in Care Council, new Care Ambassadors, & Young Inspectors, all providing avenues for young people to comment on the services that they receive.

Challenges Still Facing Us

Despite progress, we face significant and complex challenges:

- **Placement Sufficiency:** Higher numbers of adolescents with high needs and fewer local options. Limited social housing options for care experienced young people leading to higher demand on supported accommodation and ongoing costs post 18. Challenges with fostering recruitment since moving to the Southeast Regional Hub but increased locally targeted recruitment to support increased local households.
- **Financial Pressures:** National picture of increased costs of care provision, housing shortages and market constraints; plus, SBC's on-going intervention by MCHLG commissioners following their S114 notice.
- **Staffing stability:** Although improving overall, sickness absence, turnover, and regional competition still affect consistency.
- **Structural Uncertainty:** Scheduling the gradual **reintegration of SCF back into SBC** within the next 12–24 months and implementing the social care reforms.



Looking Ahead

The move from external direction via a commissioner to advisory support reflects increased confidence but not complacency. Our work continues with urgency and focus. We are preparing not just to sustain improvement but to build a stable, innovative platform for future delivery, regardless of structural form.

As part of this journey, discussions are underway regarding the gradual reintegration of Slough Children First into Slough Borough Council (SBC) within the next 12–24 months. While the viability, risks, and timeline of this transition are being carefully mapped out and explored, our core purpose remains unchanged.

Slough Children First has embarked upon the transformation associated with the local implementation of the national DfE Families First Reforms. The implementation of the reforms are significant and include the requirement to develop a service model that includes;

- **Family Help** (merging of existing Targeted Early Help Service and Children in Need, combining Social Workers and Alternatively Qualified and Experienced practitioners in multi- disciplinary teams).
- **Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs)**, leading all safeguarding and child protection activity and the establishment of the Lead Child Protection Practitioner role
- Embedding **Family Led Decision Making**, including Family Group Conferences mandated before care proceedings and the Public Law Outline
- More integrated ways of working at the Front Door enabling more **conversations to meet need at the earliest point of presentation**

The reforms represent a significant shift from the current ways of working and structure of Slough Children First services for children and young people with leadership and oversight of the reforms by the Slough Safeguarding Partnership.

The reforms provide an opportunity to identify and implement new ways of working which better meet the needs of children, young people and their families. This will require changes to the current team structures to create the end-to-end system of support, including formal consultation with staff affected.

The establishment of the Family Help Teams, and the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) will replace the current Assessment and Intervention Service, Targeted Early Help service, and the Safeguarding and Family Support service, with staff moving into roles to form the Family Help service and the MACPT. This will provide continuity of support and the establishment of the consistent Family Help Lead Practitioner and a MACPT that will lead and co-ordinate all safeguarding activity.

This Business Plan serves as a blueprint for continued improvement, and we are clear that whatever governance model and structure is adopted, children's social care in Slough will continue its drive to deliver consistently good and outstanding services. Our focus will remain



on stability, quality, and continuity of care, underpinned by the same ambition: that all children in Slough are **Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving**.

4. Local Context and Challenges

Slough remains a vibrant and diverse borough, characterised by rich cultural heritage, economic ambition, and a young population, with nearly 28% of residents under the age of 18. However, the borough also continues to face deep-rooted structural and socio-economic challenges that impact children's social care and broader outcomes for families. Understanding these realities is critical to shaping our strategic priorities and our approach to service transformation.

Strengthened Governance and Leadership

Over the past three years, Slough Children First has prioritised leadership continuity and governance maturity. Since mid 2023, the Company Board has maintained a stable core membership, contributing to the organisation's strategic clarity and accountability. In 2024, the appointment of a new Non-Executive Director with national leadership experience in children's social care further strengthened the Board's oversight capacity.

The Chief Executive of SCF also holds the statutory role of Director of Children's Services (DCS) for SBC, ensuring a unified strategic direction across education, early help, and social care. This dual role supports better alignment of services, facilitates integrated decision making, and strengthens the "One Council, One System" vision for children and families in Slough.

We are supported by a dynamic and stable Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and robust corporate governance structures, including dedicated subcommittees focused on finance, practice quality, risk, and workforce.

Consideration is now being given to streamlining the Board to decrease the amount of time spent on governance, often duplicated in different forums by both Non-Executive Directors and Officers.

Investing in Our Workforce: The Slough Academy

A central pillar of our success is our commitment to developing a stable, permanent, and skilled workforce. In a national landscape where social work recruitment and retention remain pressing concerns, with 1 in 6 social worker posts vacant nationally (DfE, 2024), SCF has been proactive in building solutions.

The Slough Academy, launched in 2024, is a workforce development initiative that supports:

- Recruitment of newly qualified, international, and experienced social workers.
- Bespoke induction and continuous professional development pathways.
- A formal Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme.
- A "grow your own" strategy through apprenticeships, student placements, and leadership coaching.
- A developing Career Progression Pathway Policy



This investment has delivered strong results:

- Reduction in agency reliance from 21% at the beginning of 2023 to 10% in 2025.
- Improved retention and staff satisfaction.
- A clearer and more attractive career progression offer.

The Academy's Phase 2 launch in 2026 will include new digital learning platforms, an extended practitioner offer, and dedicated development for the non-social care workforce (e.g. early help and family support staff).

6. Vision and Values

Our Vision: “All children in Slough are Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving.”

Our vision is more than a strapline. It is the driving force behind everything we do at Slough Children First. It reflects our relentless commitment to ensuring that every child regardless of background, identity, or circumstance grows up with the safety, love, stability, and opportunity they need to flourish.

A Culture, Not a Slogan

As we look toward 2029, our goal is for every interaction a child or family has with SCF to reflect these values, from the first contact to life changing decisions in court, to final transitions into adulthood. We believe that a values led culture is the most powerful lever we have to improve lives.

Our STAR model enables us to respond to national pressures, including cost of living, staffing instability, and rising complexity with humanity, confidence, and clarity.

Through this, we remain focused on our vision, **Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving.**

8. Strategic Priorities (2026–2029)

The next phase of our improvement journey is focused on consolidating and embedding sustainable, whole system change. The six strategic priorities outlined below form the core of this Business Improvement Plan. They reflect our response to national reform agendas including Stable Homes, Built on Love (DfE, 2023) and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2024) as well as our local learning from practice reviews, audits, and lived experience feedback.

These priorities are designed to accelerate our journey from “perform” to “reform,” shaping a resilient, child centred, and partnership led system that achieves better outcomes for all children in Slough.

A. Early Help and Access

“Right help, at the right time, in the right place.”

Over the next three years, we will transform how families access support, moving from fragmented referral pathways to community based, relational early help. This includes developing and embedding a Family Help model that integrates Early Help, Child in Need services, and multi-agency professionals under one framework.



Key Commitments:

- Launch of Family Help Hub(s) – physically or virtually co-located professionals, enabling no wrong door access to advice and support.
- Further develop the front door and multi-agency triage processes to streamline decision making and reduce duplication
- Embed a “Team Around the School” approach borough wide, scaling pilot successes.
- Use data and predictive analytics to proactively identify families needing support earlier.

Local Drivers:

- Slough's demand analysis (2024) shows rising referrals at the front door driven by domestic abuse, mental ill health or poor wellbeing and substance use.
- Nationally, Stable Homes, Built on Love emphasises a unified Family Help response by April 2026., Slough aims to progress these reforms in a timely manner.

B. Education and Preparation for Adulthood

“Equity in education, aspiration in adulthood.”

Education is the gateway to long-term wellbeing. In Slough, we aim to reduce persistent absence, increase inclusion, and ensure every young person is equipped for independence, especially those in our care or with additional vulnerabilities.

Key Commitments:

- Ensuring that poor school attendance, persistent absence and timetables other than full time are considered as potential safeguarding issues and require a systems approach
- Ensuring that the Virtual School has the necessary level of resource to strengthen attainment, attendance, and progression.
- Delivering bespoke NEET reduction pathways through our EET tracking and targeted support for care leavers and unaccompanied asylum seekers.
- Co-developing a Post-16 Transitions Strategy with education providers, training partners, and employers.
- Introducing life skills and financial literacy programmes in partnership with schools and the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS).

Local Needs:

- 13.5% of care leavers in Slough were NEET as of 2024 (down from 18% in 2022), but national best practice aims for <10% (DfE Care Leaver Data, 2023).
- The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2024) calls for stronger local inclusion partnerships and integrated transitions for SEND and care experienced young people.

C. Stable Homes



“Every child needs a safe, stable, loving home.”

Placement stability is a foundation of emotional wellbeing. Over the next three years, we will invest in reducing unnecessary care entry, increasing local in-house options, and securing permanence through trusted relationships.

Key Commitments:

- Continue to strengthen our Edge of Care services through the Adolescent Support Service (RISE)
- Embed Family Group Conferencing (FGC) and family network meetings to empower kinship care.
- Identify housing pathways for care experienced young people, including private let and house shares.
- Invest in a housing navigator role to work between Housing and Social Care, to ensure children leaving care are supported to appropriate housing between the ages of 18 and 21.
- Expand “Staying Put” and “Staying Close” arrangements for care leavers, strengthening pathways to independence.

Local Context:

- Placement demand is forecast to rise due to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and a growing cohort of those moving into being care experienced, set amidst the national context of social housing shortages.

D. Workforce Excellence

“A skilled, supported, and stable workforce is the backbone of children’s services.”

National social work vacancy rates remain high (16% nationally; 11.7% in Slough, 2024). Our focus is on maintaining a permanent workforce through excellent recruitment, retention, development, and wellbeing strategies, underpinned by the Slough Academy.

Key Commitments:

- Roll out Slough Academy Phase 2, offering career development across all roles in children’s social care.
- Deliver a Career Progression Pathway with recognised CPD, supervision, and leadership training, in line with the Social Care Reforms
- Continuing to grow our own workforce through apprenticeships and graduate pathways.

Impact to Date:

- Reduction in agency use from 21% (2023) to <10% (2025).
- High levels of permanent staff across service areas.
- Comprehensive training offer



E. Children's Participation

“Nothing about us, without us.”

Children and young people are not just recipients of services, they are experts in their own lives. Our ambition is for meaningful participation to be embedded in all levels of planning, commissioning, and decision making.

Key Commitments:

- Grow our Children in Care Councils, Care Leaver Forum, and the Young Ambassador Model.
- Investigate digital platforms and social media engagement tools to strengthen feedback loops and service co-design.
- Involve children and young people in recruitment, & training and inspection activity
- Embed participation metrics in QA and performance dashboards.

Impact to date:

- CYP helped design and construct the new Local Offer
- Participation events now influence commissioning decisions and frontline service redesign.

F. Partnership-Driven Services

“No single agency can meet all needs, system leadership is essential.”

From sufficiency planning to education, health, youth justice and voluntary sector provision, we will embed whole-system collaboration and joint commissioning to reduce duplication, improve access, and increase impact.

Key Commitments:

- Develop joint commissioning arrangements across the children's system
- Expand co-located services and shared systems (e.g., Front Door, Family Help Hub, Youth Justice).
- Implement shared measurable outcomes, driven by data and child voice.

Strategic Alignment:

- DfE reform will lead to strengthened collaborative working across the partnership, including the Multi Agency Child Protection Team
- These six strategic priorities developed in partnership with children, families, staff, and stakeholders provide a clear, coherent roadmap for delivering ambitious, achievable, and measurable outcomes. They reflect who we are, where we've been, and where we're going.



They also recognise that while structures may change, our purpose will not. Our focus remains resolute: to ensure every child in Slough is **Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving.**

The budget links the resources needed to deliver on the above priorities. Social Care reforms will enhance partnership working with the introduction of a lead practitioner, introducing more conversations with partners at the front door and closer working relationships with the police and other partners in RISE, our and Harms outside the Home services. Successful implementation of the Reforms should reduce demand at the front door and therefore reduce more statutory intervention in family life.

The development of 2 SBC owned properties to benefit our 16+ cohort of young people will expand local provision for children in our care and care experienced young people, along with our ambitions to open a care leavers hub to enhance our preparation into adulthood offer and stable home provision.

9. Enablers for Success

To deliver on our strategic priorities and realise our vision for children in Slough, we must have the right conditions in place. These four enablers, Workforce, Practice Quality, Infrastructure, and Finance are the foundation for sustained improvement, system resilience, and high impact service delivery.

A. Workforce: Permanent, Skilled, and Valued

A stable, well trained, and confident workforce is the backbone of effective children's services. At Slough Children First, we have made progress in reducing workforce instability including significantly lowering our use of agency staff and building a stronger professional development offer. But recruitment and retention remain key national challenges, particularly in high cost areas like the South East.

B. Practice Quality: Supervision, CPD, and Learning Culture

Practice excellence sits at the heart of better outcomes. We believe that high quality, child centred, and evidence informed practice must be nurtured through strong leadership, learning systems, and continuous quality assurance.

C. Infrastructure: Digital-First and Data-Enabled

Modern children's services increasingly need to be digitally confident and data smart. Effective technology and data systems allow us to understand need, monitor performance, and intervene earlier. Our ambition is for SCF to become a digitally enabled organisation that uses data to drive decision making and improve the lived experience of children and families. We will work closely with Slough Borough Council who provide our digital and technology solutions to further improve access and use of data to inform service planning for children and families.

D. Finance: Value for Money and Investment in Prevention

Delivering high quality services within a challenging fiscal context requires financial discipline, smart commissioning and investment in preventative models. SCF operates within the wider constraints of Slough Borough Council's Section 114 legacy but continues to show that good outcomes can be achieved through targeted, intelligent use of resources.



11. Partnerships

At Slough Children First, we recognise that children's outcomes are everyone's business. The complexity of challenges facing children and families today, from exploitation and SEND needs to health inequalities and housing insecurity, cannot be tackled by one agency alone. Instead, real change happens through strong, trusting, and accountable partnerships.

Over the next three years, SCF will deepen its collaborative work with statutory partners, health and education providers, the community and voluntary sector (CVS), and Slough's children and families themselves. This multi-agency approach is central to national expectations (including Stable Homes, Built on Love, 2023), and vital for delivering whole system transformation in a post pandemic, resource constrained environment.

1. Multi-Agency Partnerships: Integrated, Aligned, Impactful

We are committed to building a system where frontline practitioners, leaders, and commissioners work collaboratively and consistently, with shared goals and joined-up support. Our core partnerships include:

Slough Borough Council (SBC)

As SCF's sole owner and statutory partner, SBC plays a critical role in governance, corporate parenting, commissioning, and systems leadership. As discussions continue around SCF's reintegration into the council (2026–2028), we are actively strengthening alignment across areas such as Commissioning and back-office support functions.

Integrated Care Board (ICB) – NHS Frimley

We are working with the Frimley ICB and Slough Place-Based Partnership to improve joint planning and delivery while recognising that the reshaping of the NHS National Bodies has only just started and the ICB will soon no longer exists in its current format.

Thames Valley Police

With increasing risk from contextual harm (Child Criminal Exploitation, Child Sexual Exploitation and County lines), SCF works closely with police colleagues on youth safety, exploitation prevention, missing children responses, and safeguarding investigations.

Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS)

The CVS remains a critical partner in prevention, inclusion, and lived-experience-informed support. SCF is expanding its collaboration with local and regional organisations.

2. Strong Corporate Parenting: A Borough Wide Responsibility

Every elected member, officer, and partner in Slough has a role in corporate parenting. Our aim is to ensure that care experienced children and young people feel loved, safe, and supported 'as if they were my own'.

3. Shared Support and Commissioning Systems

To improve efficiency and sustainability, we are aligning key infrastructure and back office systems with partners, especially SBC. This is both a practical response to financial pressures and a strategic enabler for better integrated care.



12. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion: Serving our Community

Our EDI Commitment

At Slough Children First, we are committed to being an organisation that is:

- **Culturally intelligent in how we support families**
- **Equitable in how we allocate resources**
- **Anti-discriminatory in how we make decisions**
- **Representative and inclusive in who we recruit and promote**
- **Accountable in how we listen and respond to diverse voices**

We know that without this, we risk leaving children and families behind and we risk reproducing systemic harms in the very systems meant to protect them.

What We're Doing: Embedding Equity Across the System

1. Culturally Competent Practice

- Our social care and early help practitioners are trained in anti-discriminatory, trauma-informed, and culturally aware practice, including around family dynamics, gender roles, migration and asylum experience, and neurodiversity in different cultures.
- Translation tools and multilingual staff help reduce language barriers at the front door and in direct work.
- Our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) service is tailored to address the unique needs of refugee and asylum-seeking children, including mental health, identity, and legal rights.

2. Inclusive Services and Decision-Making

- We actively disaggregate data by protected characteristics to track disproportionate outcomes (e.g. CP plans, care entry, missing episodes).
- We are developing a new CYP Inclusion Dashboard to track representation and identify service gaps.
- Co-design activities specifically include underrepresented voices: faith-based youth, LGBTQ+ groups, care-experienced Black boys, and non-verbal SEND young people.

4. Community Partnerships

- We will continue to work closely with community leaders, mosques, gurdwaras, churches, cultural associations, and community partners to build trust, deliver culturally grounded interventions, and challenge stigma (e.g., around social care involvement, SEND diagnoses, or domestic abuse).
- We have worked closely with local community leaders to host the 'Knowing Me, Knowing You' partnership event in 2025 and have an ongoing relationship to continue to develop services and support access to help through this group. We will continue to build and strengthen this to help develop access to help for children and families.



Our Priorities for 2026–2029

We will further embed equality and diversity into our planning and delivery by:

- Working closely with SBC to align our commitment to EDI Strategy and Action Plan with staff, young people, and partners
- Prioritising our teams access to training across services
- Working jointly with SBC to identify equity impacting policy, commissioning, and service changes.
- Publishing disaggregated performance and satisfaction data annually
- Continuing to challenge disproportionality across services, particularly in youth justice, care entry, SEND access, and education inclusion
- Proactively seeking to recruit people from the global majority into senior levels of our organisation.

Our Pledge: Equity as a Standard, Not an Exception

We will not ask children and families to fit our system; we will shape our system around the communities we serve. We will lead with respect, listen with humility, and act with integrity. In a town as diverse as Slough, equity is not an ambition, it is a responsibility.

13. Financial Strategy (2026–2029)

As a demand-led service, our operational costs continue to be driven by the demands experienced by the service; from the initial point of contact regarding concern for a child or requesting help for a family; to a child entering care; through to young people exiting care into the world of adulthood.

Our profit and loss account in relation to the 3-year business plan is set out below.



	Plan 2026/27 £000's	Plan 2027/28 £000's	Plan 2028/29 £000's
Income			
SBC Income	(39,517)	(38,789)	(39,296)
SBC other income	0	0	0
DFE Income	0	0	0
Grant Income	(4,962)	(5,450)	(5,933)
Other Income	(881)	(931)	(945)
Total Income	(45,359)	(45,170)	(46,174)
Expenditure			
Pay & Agency	20,538	20,410	20,445
Placements	14,674	14,807	15,283
Support to children and young adults	5,199	5,130	5,516
Legal fees	1,616	1,469	1,552
Overheads	3,332	3,355	3,378
Transformation costs	0	0	0
Total revenue expenditure	45,360	45,170	46,174
Revenue (Surplus) / Deficit	0	0	0

Year 1

Year 1 represents a growth request to SBC of £1,162k. This is made up the following growth, savings and inflation as set out in the table below.

During 2025/26 it became clear that the volume of care experienced young people requiring support in accommodation was more than expected. This is as a result of the lack of social housing and delayed Home Office decision making leading to young people not getting status and therefore not being able to claim benefits or work. Growth of 23 FTE has therefore been included. Offsetting this is rate reductions as Commissiong look to find alternative and cheaper accommodation in the private let market for our 18+ cohort.

Significant savings of over £1m are expected in salaries. This is because of an increasingly permanent workforce and the introduction of AI reducing time taken on minuting meetings. However, the new Children's Social Care Reforms requires growth in the form of the establishment of Lead Child Protection Practitioners. They are new posts mandated by the DfE and there will be some need for pump priming these posts and introducing new ways of working to ensure safe transfer from the current model to the future model of creating a Family Help service and a Multi-Agency Child Protection Team. This will also necessitate and require additional quality assurance and managerial oversight as well as enabling children and young people to be safely supported by moving to the new model and new ways of working whilst implementing the new model.

All the additional transformation and improvement funding in SCF for 2025/26 has also been removed for 2026/27 on the assumption that OFSTEd will have carried out their full ILACS Inspection during Q4 of 2025/26 and that the outcome is positive.

Placement savings are predicated on the successful recruitment of in house foster carers and the plan for 26/27 assumes 8 additional in-house placements by year end. As there



are currently this number of carers currently under assessment. SCF are also targeting recruitment to find resilience foster carers to care for children with more complex needs as an alternative to residential and these are included within the plans for years 1 and 2.

SCF in conjunction with SBC are currently exploring using SBC's capital funding to develop a 7-bed semi-independent provision for 16-18 year olds who require minimal support. Savings are included within the placements line below with a cabinet decision expected in December 25 or January 26 for the funding. This is likely to impact mainly on our UASC cohort which accounts for approximately 17-18% of our children in care population, more than our statistical neighbours rate of 14%. Capital investment required for this is in the region of £150k.

	£'000s
Prior Year Core Contract 2025/26	38,355
In Year Request - Pay inflation - 25/26 add 1%	176
In Year Request - Loss of SBC Transformation contribution	150
In Year Request - Care Leaver Growth 25/26	367
Prior Year Funding Request 2025/26	39,047
 Inflationary Growth	 1,397
Growth	
Demand Growth - Care Leavers	430
Income Loss growth	715
Total Growth	2,541
 Savings	
Additional Income	(100)
Pay and Agency Reductions	(1,189)
Placement Savings	(497)
Care Leavers - improved rates	(157)
Savings in Legal costs	(128)
Total Savings	(2,071)
 Proposed Core Contract 2026/27	 39,518
Change from 2025/26	1,163

Years 2 and 3

Year 2 sees further staff savings. If the reforms are implemented as planned and demand reduces due to the transformation at the front door and the Family Help service then we are able to reduce the number of Family Help PODs (teams) by the start of year 2 through natural attrition to avoid redundancies.

Foster care recruitment continues for in house carers and an additional resilience carer.



Most significant is the proposed conversion of a large property, currently owned by SBC, to develop into a 10-bed provision for car experienced young people who can live independently, as well as a care leavers hub. This will require circa £1m of capital investment, with proposed savings of £250k per year.

Risks remain in the plan for 2026/27 – 2028/29 as the effects of the Reforms are unknown. Pathfinder authorities are not yet in a position to understand the implications. It must also be noted that the plan assumes minimal redundancy costs on the basis that redeployment opportunities both within SCF and SBC are available if required.

Other areas which have been considered but not included in the above are increasing Foster Care and Special guardianship carer rates to encourage more recruitment in this area. Initial workings suggest the cost far outweighs the benefits.

Due to the low usage of direct payments within SCF, we are also looking at ways to promote its take up which may be able to reduce 3rd party packages of support.

Key Metrics

Slough's context in relation to demands are a reducing population for children, as seen nationally.

The Business Improvement Plan has modelled, using ONS data and past trends, the key metrics in terms of activity.

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Assessments	384	394	380	376	371
CIN	439	441	399	340	334
CP	178	227	236	233	230
CLA	190	188	193	193	197
CL	240	270	271	268	264
Other	69	87	86	85	84
Total Statutory	1,500	1,605	1,565	1,496	1,480
Total TEH	499	423	458	507	502
Total	1,999	2,028	2,023	2,002	1,982

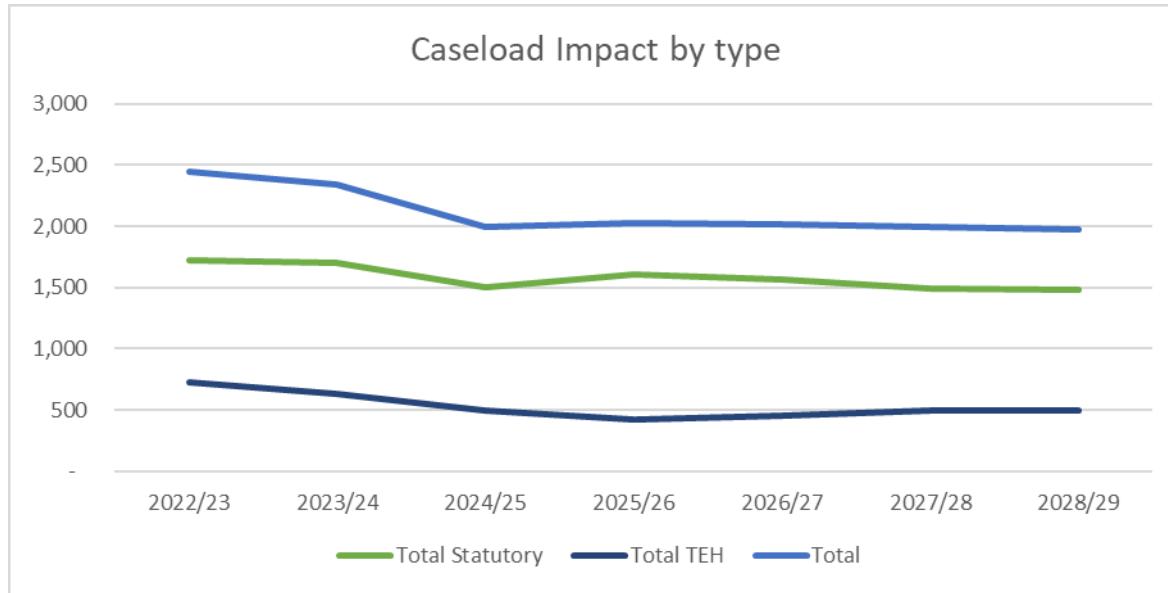
It is expected that due to declining younger populations, the numbers of children open to SCF will gradually decline.

It is unclear as yet the difference the Social Care Reforms will make to whether children are on an Early Help, Child in Need or Child protection plan, but the reforms should mean it doesn't make a difference to the family if we are working holistically with 1 key lead worker, what sort of plan a child is on.

Modelling suggests a 0.6% reduction in population, or a reduction of 23 children. Although the population is declining, we expect an increase in the care experienced cohort of young



people requiring financial support to be a growth area due to the national housing shortages for social housing and delays in Home Office decision making determining the status of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. This makes it harder for a young person to reach full independence, and they require support for a longer period of time.



Slough is not immune to other national pressures and changes, and the Social Care Reforms as outlined previously represent a significant change to both the workforce structure, and the relationship between state and family.

The Business Improvement Plan for 26/27 – 28/29 includes service design that gives fidelity with the Families First Reforms and puts the Child at the heart and centre of our family help approach. We have co-produced our approach through consultation by reaching out to various groups and cohorts of our young people and staff consultation.

The workforce structure built into the 3-year plan include the following key elements:

- Creation of multi-disciplinary family help teams that combines Early Help and work with Children in Need and are made up of a combination of Senior Social Workers, Social Workers and alternatively qualified and experienced practitioners
- Children and Families work with one consistent lead practitioner throughout their journey and involvement with SCF unless they require support through children in care teams.
- Multi Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPT) that bring a lead child protection practitioner overseeing child protection work. Strategic oversight of our Harms outside the Homes team.
- Increase middle management capacity through introduction of service lead roles which will focus on operations to free up Heads of Service to take a more strategic approach to focus on the Improvement plan and improving practice.



- Gives more management oversight and support to front line practitioners
- Creation of 11 family help teams to work with 1,663 children across EH, CIN and CP.

The workforce resource required to meet the demand and the requirements of the reforms are set out below with a small reduction in the number of posts overall. Due to our successes with grow your own social workers through Frontline, Step Up, ASYE and international recruitment programmes, it is expected that the average volume of agency staff in the workforce is 5.8%, 21 FTE, 12 of which are short term maternity or sickness cover. Removing the inflationary effects, staff costs represent a reduction v 25/26 budget of £228k.

	2024/25			2025/26 - Budget			2025/26 - F'cast (P5)			2026/27		
	Permanenter	Agency	Vacancy	Permanent	Agency	Vacancy	Permanent	Agency	Vacancy	Permanent	Agency	Vacancy
FTE	288.82	34.75	39.25	323.09	15.45	24.98	296.61	31.33	22.60	314.85	20.99	25.08
%age	79.60%	9.58%	10.82%	88.88%	4.25%	6.87%	84.61%	8.94%	6.45%	87.23%	5.82%	6.95%
Total FTE		362.82			363.53			350.54			360.92	
Costs	16,738	2,901		19,025	1,477		18,326	2,674		19,936	987	
Total Costs - pre inflation		19,640			20,502			21,000			20,923	

Inflationary pressures nationally following the increase in National Insurance contributions are affecting rates, on top of what is already a challenging market where demand for bespoke homes for children entering care far outstrip the supply. Our inflationary assumptions are a 3.2% salary uplift for 26/27, and 2% thereafter, with contract inflation at 2% per year.

The impact on this for 26/27 is as per the below:

Inflation effects	£'000
Staff	637
Placements	524
Other child	183
Other	53
	1,397

Our secondary cost area is in spend on children's placements. Key priorities and initiatives to help reduce costs in 26/27 and beyond include:

- Edge of Care work with adolescents
- Resilience Fostering
- Foster care recruitment
- Semi-Independent accommodation development

Our total placements spend is set out in the table below. SCF currently have fewer UASCs than the Home Office cap and therefore this is an area of growth, largely offset by income. The volume of care leavers being supported can be seen as a real growth area, with an average of 90 being supported through the year versus a budget in 25/26 of 68.

Average unit costs are expected to fall on 25/26 budget, and 25/26 forecast. Initiatives such as recruitment of 8 inhouse foster carers, 1 resilience foster carer (as an alternative to high cost residential or external fostering) and the edge of care team enabling cost avoidance through more support with families to retain children at home, or reunify when they may temporarily come into care, all assist in reducing costs.



SCF are working with SBC to utilise a currently empty property in SBC's estate to develop into a 7-bed semi-independent provision for 16-18 year olds who can live with a small amount of support.

Placement Budget 2026/27										
	F'cast 25/26 @ P5			Budget 25/26			Budget 26/27			Variance to Bud 25/26
	FTE	Rate	Total	FTE	Rate	Total	FTE	Rate	Total	
	£'000s			£'000s			£'000s			
Children Looked After	48	2,741	6,884	60	2,410	7,538	59	2,256	6,993	-1 -154 -546
External Residential	16	6,015	4,915	17	6,059	5,357	17	4,725	4,109	-0 -1,334 -1,247
Asylum Seeker 16-18 (Semi-Independent)	23	1,099	1,327	32	950	1,585	32	1,455	2,395	-0 505 810
Semi Independent < 18's	9	1,319	642	11	1,037	596	11	836	488	0 -201 -108
Secure Remand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Children Looked After	48	2,741	6,884	60	2,410	7,538	59	2,256	6,993	-1 -154 -546
Permanency	206	217	2,335	214	226	2,524	208	253	2,745	-6 27 222
Adoption Allowances	70	217	789	68	223	789	70	176	641	2 -47 -148
Special Guardianship Order	136	217	1,546	146	228	1,735	138	292	2,104	-8 65 370
Permanency total	206	217	2,335	214	226	2,524	208	253	2,745	-6 27 222
Fostering	122	805	5,128	111	788	4,569	123	768	4,936	12 -20 367
External Fostering Agency	64	1,079	3,601	56	1,102	3,232	58	1,099	3,298	1 -3 67
In House Foster Carers	58	503	1,527	55	466	1,337	66	478	1,638	11 12 301
Fostering Total	122	805	5,128	111	788	4,569	123	768	4,936	12 -20 367
Total Placements	376	731	14,347	385	728	14,631	391	720	14,674	5 -8 43
Careleavers	99	622	3,224	68	671	2,365	90	627	2,955	23 -44 589

SCF will continue to search for further opportunities for joint working, especially with SBC's Housing Directorate to fulfil SBC's corporate parenting responsibilities. The sharing of a small number of stand-alone support posts are also being aligned to SBC.

Taking all the above together, our key organisational activity drivers and data for the next year is summed up in the table below.



Key Metrics				
	24/25 Act	25/26 Bud	25/26 F'cast	26/27 Bud
Permanent Staff	289	314	296	315
Agency	39.25	25	31	21
Total Staff	328.25	339	327	336
Children open to SCF - Statutory	1500	1524	1605	1565
Children open to SCF - Early Help	499	601	423	458
Children open to SCF - Total	1999	2125	2028	2023
Children on a CIN plan	487	426	418	399
Children on a CP Plan	236	204	206	236
Children Looked After	225	227	215	193
Care Leavers in accommodation	61	63	95	90
UASC <18	27	32	25	32
UASC >18	38	48	59	59
Total UASC	65	80	84	91

Our 12-month cash flow as depicted in the table below suggests that the company will be able to manage within its means for the next financial year.

	CASH FLOW FORECAST												
	Fcst Mar-26 £000's	Fcst Apr-26 £000's	Fcst May-26 £000's	Fcst Jun-26 £000's	Fcst Jul-26 £000's	Fcst Aug-26 £000's	Fcst Sep-26 £000's	Fcst Oct-26 £000's	Fcst Nov-26 £000's	Fcst Dec-26 £000's	Fcst Jan-27 £000's	Fcst Feb-27 £000's	Fcst Mar-27 £000's
RECEIPTS:	-4,918	-4,232	-4,511	-4,573	-4,232	-4,511	-3,952	-4,853	-4,511	-3,952	-4,232	-5,133	-3,952
EXPENDITURE:	4,292	4,439	4,439	4,439	4,439	4,439	4,439	4,439	4,439	4,439	4,439	4,439	4,439
NET CASHFLOW	-626	207	-73	-134	207	-73	487	-414	-73	487	207	-694	487
BANK BALANCE B/F	-5,567	-6,193	-5,986	-6,059	-6,193	-5,986	-6,058	-5,572	-5,986	-6,058	-5,571	-5,364	-6,058
BANK BALANCE C/F	-6,193	-5,986	-6,059	-6,193	-5,986	-6,058	-5,572	-5,986	-6,058	-5,571	-5,364	-6,058	-5,571
SECONDARY ACCOUNT BALANCE	-32	-32	-32	-32	-32	-32	-32	-32	-32	-32	-32	-32	-32
Total	-6,225	-6,018	-6,091	-6,225	-6,018	-6,091	-5,604	-6,018	-6,091	-5,604	-5,397	-6,090	-5,603

SCF's balance sheet shows the projected position for the next year at a balanced position. The position represents a movement from the surplus in 2024/25 of £249k to a balanced position in 2025/26.

SCF are predicting a deficit in 2025-26 following an additional percentage uplift over and above expectations in the pay award, loss of transformation funding from SBC and increasing numbers of care leavers in accommodation. In year requests to fund these have been submitted to SBC and the balance for 2025/26 assumes funding of these losses to bring the 2025/26 balance sheet to a balance position.



Slough Children First Ltd

Balance Sheet	as at 31 Mar	as at 31 Mar	as at 31 Mar	as at 31 Mar
	2025	2026	2027	2028
	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's
Current Assets				
Debtors	3,417	2,417	4,429	653
Cash at bank and in hand / (overdrawn)	7,060	6,225	4,808	4,814
Total current assets	10,477	8,642	9,237	5,467
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	(10,228)	(8,642)	(9,237)	(5,467)
Total current liabilities	(10,228)	(8,642)	(9,237)	(5,467)
Net current assets / (Liabilities)	249	(0)	(0)	(0)
Long Term Creditors - Receipts in Advance	0	0	0	0
Total long term liabilities	0	0	0	0
Net Assets / (Liabilities)	249	(0)	(0)	(0)
Reserves				
Income and Expenditure Account	249	(0)	(0)	(0)
Reserves	249	(0)	(0)	(0)

14. Risk and Quality Assurance

Delivering excellent services to children requires a relentless focus on quality, safety, and accountability. At Slough Children First, we recognise that achieving good and outstanding outcomes is not just about compliance, it is about impact. This section outlines how we proactively manage risk and drive continuous improvement through a culture of learning, reflection, and results.

1. Risk Management: Strategic and Operational Oversight

SCF maintains a Live Risk Register that captures both strategic and operational risks. This tool ensures we are not only reactive to challenges, but also anticipatory and prepared. The register is updated quarterly and overseen by the SCF Executive, reported to the Audit & Risk Committee, and shared regularly with the SCF Board and Slough Borough Council as our shareholder.

The risk register categorises risks as Red, Amber, Green (RAG) with mitigations, owners, target dates, and risk movement commentary.

2. Quality Assurance: Driving Learning, Not Just Monitoring

Our Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) provides the structure for evaluating the quality, consistency, and impact of services with the express purpose of driving improvement and supporting our workforce. It is reported monthly to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and to the Transformation and Improvement Board.



The Slough Quality Assurance approach:

Various qualitative and quantitative measures to provide triangulation and depth of understanding of practice are structured within the Slough Quality Assurance Framework. The approach to all elements is restorative and strengths based. Elements include:

- **Deep Dive Audits:** A regular programme of audits across all service areas. Key elements of the audit process include a collaborative approach that meaningfully involves practitioners and enables an understanding of context and wider practice challenges. This enables a depth of insight that a review of a case file alone would not provide.
- **Dip sampling:** a more focused view on key elements of practice. These are informed by themes that emerge from deep dive audits, data anomalies and areas of practice that are highlighting Key Lines of Enquiry.
- **Moderation:** a panel provides reassurance as to audit consistency and appropriateness of grading. As well as providing a view on practice it enables reassurance as to the quality of auditing and a chance for a shared perspective on quality assurance.
- **Service area Review:** Alongside the regular programme of auditing is a structured approach to service area review. This is an in-depth review of practice based on audit themes triangulated against wider sources of intelligence including data, complaints/compliments, views of practitioners, views of children/families, learning from relevant Safeguarding Partnership reviews. The review engages management and practitioners to develop tailored planning that is owned by the practitioners and links into service improvement.

All aspects of the above are aligned to the ILACS evaluation criteria and supported by guidance including Working Together 2023, Children's Social Care National Framework, wider national Ofsted inspection commentary as well as wider research.

Closing the Loop:

Following the above approach to understanding practice across services the learning is used to support and address any practice issues for individual children and young people but is also used to provide and evidence base for systemic change. Learning is filtered into various provisions to promote and support practice improvement. This includes:

- **Senior Management Line of sight:** Reporting is filtered through to support an understanding of practice across services at the highest levels. This includes Improvement Board, Senior Management Team meetings, wider agencies via the Safeguarding Partnership sub-streams.
- **Practice improvement Planning:** The development of team/service improvement planning via the service reviews informs higher level improvement plans. This approach ensures that planning is linked and complimentary rather than repetitive and disjointed.
- **Slough Social Care Academy:** Under the direction of the Principal Social Worker there is a clear link through the academy between senior management and practitioners and that strengths identified through learning are understood and maintained, and that challenges are identified and addressed in a supportive and



proactive way. The academy has learning mentors who engage directly with practitioners in building a learning culture.

- **Reauditing:** Where inadequacy is identified through audit then there is escalation, addressing of concerns and follow up via reaudit, dip sample and/or audit action tracking.
- **Follow up Service Review:** Initial service reviews result in recommendations that inform improvement planning but also provide a basis for an ongoing cycle of review that measures impact.

The above provides a structured means to accountability and promoting a learning culture that is influenced by the Slough values for our children and young people of being Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving.

15. Monitoring and Accountability

Strong monitoring and accountability are vital to ensure that strategic ambitions lead to meaningful, measurable improvements for children and families. At Slough Children First (SCF), we are committed to a transparent, data-informed, and improvement-driven culture, grounded in evidence, impact, and partnership oversight.

We know that delivering high-quality services for children is not just about compliance — it's about relentless focus on progress and ensuring that our actions result in real change for the most vulnerable in our community.

1. Progress Against Improvement Actions

This Business Plan sets out clear strategic priorities, each with defined improvement actions, timelines, and success indicators. Progress against these actions is tracked through our Business Plan Delivery Tracker, which includes:

- Quarterly milestones for each objective
- Responsible leads and accountable owners
- Links to relevant KPIs and audit feedback
- Risk and resource flagging
- Evidence of impact on practice, culture, and outcomes

Each directorate is required to update their delivery plans quarterly, and these feed into our internal assurance cycle and reporting to governance bodies.

Progress reviews are also triangulated with:

- Monthly performance data
- Quarterly quality assurance audits
- Participation and feedback from children, families, and staff
- External scrutiny (e.g. DfE Advisor, SBC)

This creates a golden thread between strategy, practice, and lived experience.



2. Oversight from the DfE and Commissioner/Advisor

Since exiting the most intensive phase of government intervention, SCF continues to benefit from external challenge and guidance through an appointed DfE Advisor. Their role includes:

- Chairing six weekly Improvement Board meetings
- Reviewing progress against key themes: workforce, safeguarding, placement sufficiency, SEND, early help
- Providing feedback to the DfE and Ministerial team
- Supporting alignment to national priorities (e.g. Stable Homes, Built on Love)

In early 2025, the DfE confirmed SCF's movement from intervention to advisory status, noting significant improvements in stability, leadership, and early help access.

SCF also continues to collaborate with regional and national improvement partners, including:

- The South East Sector-Led Improvement Programme (SLIP)
- DfE Pathfinder initiatives for Family Help and care leavers
- Peer reviews and thematic deep dives supported by SBC and LGA

3. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) Aligned to ILACS and National Benchmarks

SCF has adopted a refined KPI framework directly aligned to the Ofsted ILACS framework, enabling consistent tracking across the four inspection judgments:

- The experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection
- The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers
- The impact of leaders on social work practice
- Overall effectiveness

Our core performance domains include:

- Front door demand and timeliness (e.g. MASH decisions in 1 day)
- Caseloads and supervision frequency
- CIN and CP plan durations and reactivations
- Children in care placement stability
- NEET levels among care leavers
- Participation metrics (e.g. reviews attended, feedback received)
- Child-level outcome indicators (e.g. return home rates, EET progression)

Live dashboards are reviewed:

- Monthly by the Executive Leadership Team (ELT)
- Quarterly by the SCF Board, Improvement Board and Audit & Risk Committee



- Annually by Ofsted in the Annual conversation visits

4. Annual Review and Scrutiny

Every year, SCF will publish an Annual Business Plan Review, reflecting on:

- Progress against strategic priorities
- Performance outcomes
- Learning from QA, audit, and inspection
- Feedback from children, staff, and partners
- Risk register review and future priorities

This review is formally submitted to:

- The SCF Board (as shareholder-led governance)
- The Slough Borough Council People Scrutiny Committee
- The DfE Advisor and Ministerial review (as required)

A “You Said, We Did” summary of the review is co-produced with young people and published publicly to ensure transparency and community engagement.

Additionally, SCF will be subject to:

- Annual internal audit reviews (commissioned by SBC and/or the SCF Board)
- Thematic deep dives (e.g. adolescent safeguarding, workforce culture)
- Corporate parenting scorecard updates

Monitoring that Drives Impact

In Slough, monitoring is not just about data, it's about understanding what's working and where we need to improve. Our model balances compliance, challenge, and compassion. It ensures we are accountable not only to the DfE or Ofsted, but first and foremost to the children, young people, and families we serve.

We will continue to strengthen our accountability framework by:

- Deepening partner scrutiny and alignment with SBC systems
- Strengthening feedback loops across teams and services
- Co-producing outcome targets with young people
- Prioritising impact over activity through the “So What?” lens

“We hold ourselves to account not only for doing things, but for making a difference.”

16. Appendices

- Data July 2025
- Improvement Roadmap (Plan on a Page)



- Corporate Risk Overview
- Governance Structure
- Year on Year Financial Reconciliation



Appendix 1

Data July 2025

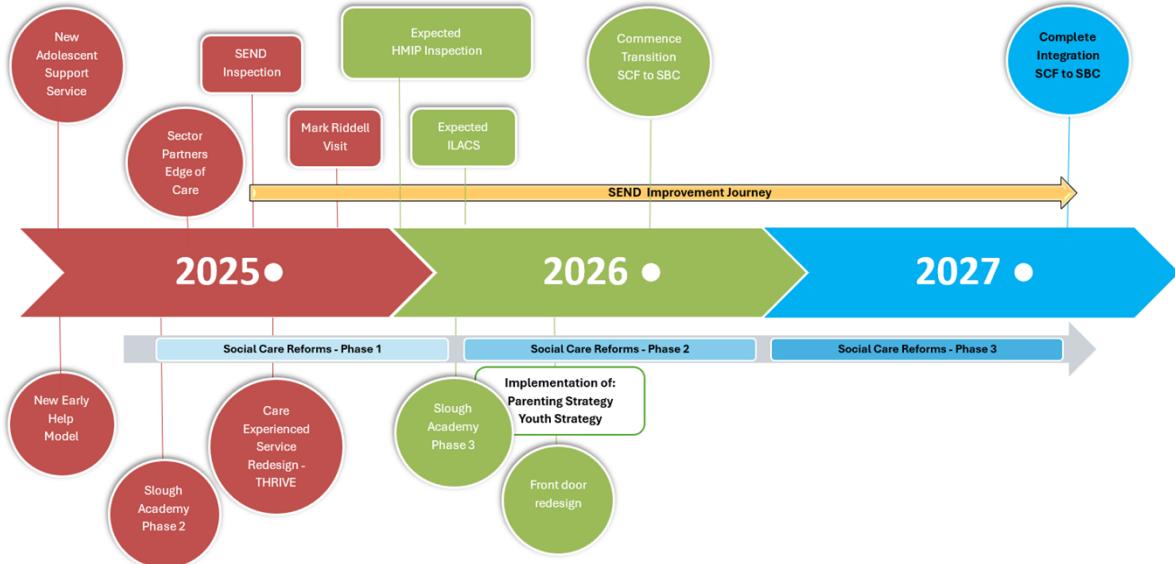
*Data set: Under 18s – Jun 2024 (based on ONS mid-year estimates), FSM & EAL – May 2025, Global Majority – Jan 2024

Children and young people in Slough	Children in our care in Slough	Outcomes in the last 12 months
46,686 children and young people in Slough	193 children in our care as of July 2025	
Under 18s	 65% live with foster families	11 children have been adopted
England: 21% Slough: 28%		
Eligible for Free School Meals	11% live with parents, in adoptive or other placements	 25 children have returned home
England: 27% Slough: 22%		
English as an additional language	 24% live in residential accommodation (including supported accommodation)	 5 children have become the subject of a Special Guardianship Order
England: 21% Slough: 53%	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children	 9 children remained with their foster carers
Global Majority Background	England: 9% Slough: 17%	
England: 30% Slough: 58%		



Appendix 2

Improvement Roadmap





Appendix 3

SCF Corporate Risk Overview July 2025

CR01 Failure to Safeguard Children and Young People										Risk owner: Sue Butcher																																				
Corporate risk overview										Risk appetite statement (Averse/Balanced)																																				
<p>From Q1 risk title changed to Failure to Safeguard Children and Young People.</p> <p>Risk score has remained at 18 (RAG Amber) despite the current impact of poor data quality on the work of SCF. Poor data production is an underpinning risk impacting on SCFs cost effectiveness, staff satisfaction and achieving fully effective performance management. The core data is held – but across multiple systems and is not straightforward to access or keep up to date.</p> <p>A number of risks remain on the corporate risk register despite now being judged as unlikely to occur. This reflects their significance and that they have been ongoing risks until recently. Two relate to staffing. The current position is that caseloads per social worker are low. Attracting and retaining permanent staff is also not a current risk – reflecting work done over the past few years to improve retention. The most recent period with SCF has been to move to part time staff in certain areas with lower costs of living. Nationally there is a national significant change in how localised social services are delivered out over the next 12 months. This will mean that roles for current staff will be redesigned and competition for strong staff will increase. This could impact on retention. A number of staff are leaving as a result of performance management – most of these should exit in Q1.</p> <p>SCF in 2025/6 is expecting to deliver a balanced budget.</p> <p>Children's Social Care is subject to a Statutory Direction from the Department of Education overseen by a DfE Commissioner</p>										The risk SCF risk appetite is supported by robust evidence informed service planning.																																				
<p>The safety of children is paramount to the organisation however it is not possible to prevent child deaths or serious harm from taking place.</p>																																														
<p>Risk profile</p> <p>Refer to slide 7 for risk assessment score instructions</p>																																														
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Appendix 4

Slough Children First governance arrangements

The Company is a wholly owned subsidiary of Slough Borough Council (the Council) and is constituted as a company limited by guarantee. The Company is governed by a Board of 7 Directors appointed by a combination of the Board and the Council in consultation with the Department for Education (DfE) to ensure operational independence from the Council.

The Company was established in response to inadequate OFSTED ratings following inspection of children's services at Slough Borough Council in 2011, 2013 & 2015. The service is now rated overall 'Requires Improvement' though a statutory direction to improve remains in place.

The work of the Board was supported by its sub-committees:

- The Audit and Finance Committee
- The People and Practice Committee
- The Remuneration, Nominations and Appointments Committee

During 2024/25 the Board integrated the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee with the Finance Committee to streamline decision making and allow a single lens on financial oversight and risk management. This is now the Audit and Finance Committee.

The sub-committees met throughout the year with regular reporting to the Board on key issues to inform strategic plans.

Our vision and objectives

The Company's vision remains for children and young people in Slough to be happy, safe & loved, thriving. The objectives are set out within our Articles of Association. These are to provide social care, youth justice and other related services and support to children, young people and their families for the advancement of the community.



Appendix 5

Year on Year Financial Reconciliation

The table below sets out a reconciliation between the 25/26 core contract funding and the 26/27 core contract funding requirement. The inflationary uplifts, growth and savings are also detailed in the table.

The 2025/26 core contract value was originally budgeted at £38,355k, but 3 in year requests totalling £692k have meant the total funding request for 2025/26 is £39,047k.

The net effect between the revised 25/26 value and the 26/27 value is a growth request of £471k, £1,397k of which is inflationary cost pressures.

		2026/27
Prior Year Core Contract 2025/26		38,355
In Year Request - Pay inflation - 25/26 add 1%		176
In Year Request - Loss of SBC Transformation contribution		150
In Year Request - Care leaver growth		367
Prior Year Funding Request 2025/26		39,047
Variations		
Pay Inflation		637
Placement Inflation		524
Care Leavers placement inflation		105
Legal Inflation		32
Other Contract Inflation		118
Income inflation		(19)
		1,397
Growth		
Care Experienced - Growth in Care Leaver numbers		430
Income - Loss of DfE Running Costs Grant		450
Income - Loss of health contributions		225
Income - DfE ending funding of Chair costs		40
		1,145
Savings		
Income - Add'l interest		(100)
Salaries- Reduction of posts		(540)
Salaries - more favourable agency:Perm ratio		(649)
Legal - Reduction in care proceeding volumes & lower disbursements		(128)
Placements - Fostering Recruitment		(343)
Placements - Resilience fostering		(17)
Placements - Edge of Care		(124)
Placements - In House Semi - independent provision		(12)
Care Experienced - Private Lets		(157)
		(2,071)
Total Variation to Funding Requirement		471
Proposed Core Contract 2026/27		39,517